Indigenous Jurists and Academics Tour

Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin

Supreme Court of Canada

The Honourable Michelle O'Bonsawin was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada on September 1, 2022, following five years as a Justice of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. An Abenaki member of the Odanak First Nation and a fluent bilingual Franco-Ontarian from Hanmer, Ontario, she brings extensive expertise in Indigenous, mental health, and human rights law. Before her judicial appointments, she served as General Counsel for the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, where she focused on forensic mental health and Gladue principles. Her legal career also includes roles with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canada Post. Justice O'Bonsawin has taught Indigenous law at the University of Ottawa and is a published author on topics including access to justice, mental health, and Indigenous legal issues. She holds degrees from Laurentian University, the University of Ottawa, Osgoode Hall, and a Doctorate in Law, and has received honorary doctorates from Bishop's and Laurentian Universities. She currently serves as co-president of the International Association of Indigenous Judges and is active in several legal and judicial organisations in Canada and internationally.

Justice Johanna Price

Court of King's Bench of Alberta, Canada

Justice Johanna Price is a member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation in Quebec, Canada, and is of both Indigenous and Chinese descent. Her diverse background and commitment to justice led her to pursue a legal career. She holds a BA in Political Science from the University of Calgary (1994) and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of British Columbia (1998). After articling and practising at McCarthy Tétrault LLP, she joined the civil litigation firm Peacock Linder Halt & Mack LLP, where she later became a partner.

In 2019, Justice Price was appointed to the Alberta Court of King's Bench, the province's Superior Trial Court. She primarily hears civil and criminal matters in Calgary and across Alberta's 11 judicial districts. She is co-chair of the Court's Indigenous Initiatives and Relations Committee and chairs the Tsuut'ina Peacemaker Court Advisory Committee, supporting the court's restorative justice approach. Justice Price remains deeply connected to her community through regular visits to her home of Kitigan Zibi.

Judge Peggy L. Bird

Former Chief Judge, Pueblo of Pojoaque Tribal Court

Hon. Peggy L. Bird (Kewa Pueblo, New Mexico) is the former Chief Judge of the Pueblo of Pojoaque Tribal Court and has served as a tribal judge for over 19 years across multiple Pueblo Indian Nations. She is a board member of the National American Indian Court Judges Association (NAICJA) and a founding member of several national organisations advocating for Indigenous women's rights and justice.

Judge Bird's leadership and advocacy have been recognised with national awards, and she holds a law degree from the University of New Mexico and a PhD from Arizona State University. She brings to this conference her extensive experience in tribal justice and advancing the rights of Indigenous peoples, particularly women and families.

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Associate Professor Naiomi Metallic

Chancellor's Chair in Aboriginal Law and Policy, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, Canada

Associate Professor Naiomi Metallic is from the Listuguj Mìgmaq First Nation in the Gespègewàgi district of Mìgmàgi (Quebec, Canada) and is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She was the first Mìgmaq person to clerk at the Supreme Court of Canada and is a leading expert in Constitutional, Aboriginal, and Indigenous law. Recognised as one of Canada's top lawyers in Aboriginal law since 2015, she has appeared in numerous high-profile Indigenous rights cases. She was named one of Canadian Lawyers' Magazine's Top 25 Most Influential Lawyers in 2018 and received the Canadian Bar Association's 2024 Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for outstanding contributions to law reform and legal scholarship. Her academic work centres on Indigenous self-determination, governance, and legal revitalization, and she is currently completing a PhD on the use of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for Indigenous self-government in Canada. She also works closely with Indigenous communities to revitalise their laws through language and storytelling.

Judge Karen Whonnock

Provincial Court of British Columbia, Canada

Judge Karen Whonnock (Tzimih) is from the Gitdumden clan of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation and was appointed to the Provincial Court of British Columbia in 2016. She previously served as Director's Counsel under the Child, Family and Community Services Act and taught Gladue Report Writing at the Justice Institute of BC and the Legal Services Society. Judge Whonnock also served as an Associate Judge for the Colville Tribal Court in Washington State (2002–2006) and has held roles as Lead Treaty Negotiator and Spokesperson for the Office of the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs. Appointed Queen's Counsel in 2014, she has a long-standing commitment to advancing Indigenous justice. Her academic work includes a Master's thesis on Indigenous women and domestic violence (Osgoode Hall, 2003) and a doctoral dissertation on Aboriginal youth incarceration and Witsuwit'en law (Royal Roads University, 2018).

Professor Leilani Tuala-Warren

Former Supreme Court Judge, Samoa; Dean, School of Law, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Professor Tuala-Warren is the current Dean of Te Piringa Faculty of Law at the University of Waikato and is the first Dean of Law of Pacific descent in Aotearoa and the first Pacific woman to be a Professor of Law in Aotearoa. Her career has spanned various roles, including serving as a state solicitor, a lawyer in private practice and the first Executive Director of the Samoa Law Reform Commission. She was the first Family Court and Family Violence Court Judge in Samoa in 2013. and the second woman to be appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court in Samoa in 2016, a role she held until 2023. She continues to hold a temporary warrant as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Samoa.

In recognition of her achievements, she was awarded the University of Waikato's Distinguished Alumni Award in August 2022. She has just been appointed a Member of the Waitangi Tribunal and is the first person of Pacific descent to be appointed to the Tribunal.